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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HUSSEINI CALLS FOR NEW ELECTORAL LAW,
STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Former Speaker of Parliament and resigned Shi'a parliamentarian Hussein Husseini met visiting NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary David Hale, DCM, and visiting NEA Lebanon Desk Officer Matthew Irwin on December 18, saying that without a fair electoral law, strong judiciary and parliament, and state-led development in southern Lebanon, Lebanese sovereignty and security would remain at risk.

A STRONG STATE NEEDS STRONG INSTITUTIONS

¶2. (C) Husseini expressed his gratitude for U.S. support for freedom and democracy in Lebanon, noting that the country's constitutionally mandated confessional power-sharing arrangement was not a problem, but that a weak legal framework and judiciary had allowed the gutting of national institutions like the parliament and security forces. He outlined a three-part strategy for strengthening the Lebanese state. First, Lebanon needed a proper electoral law. "Doha canceled the state. The new law does not comport with the Taif Accord or international standards." Second, Lebanon needed an independent and credible judiciary with the power to interpret the constitution. Third, Lebanon needed a comprehensive, state-centric development plan. "Without this, various parties will continue to prevent the emergence of Lebanese state and Lebanese national identity."

¶3. (C) Calling him the "father of Taif" and noting that his protest resignation from parliament had been admirable, Hale assured Husseini that the United States was committed to strengthening Lebanon's institutions and that after a benighted period of continued Syrian occupation post-Taif, the international community had a second chance to preserve a sovereign and independent Lebanon. Hale agreed that the electoral law agreed upon at Doha left much to be desired, but said it was likely too late to make significant changes. "On the contrary," Husseini replied, "in 2005 we had a new law two months before the elections. There's plenty of time. It's not too late to adopt the law recommended by the Boutros Commission." (Note: The Boutros Commission of political officials and legal experts was commissioned in 2005 to draft a fair and modern Lebanese electoral law. The

resulting "Boutros law" recommended a mixed system of proportional and winner-take-all voting, but was cast aside at Doha in favor of a modified version of the 1960 electoral law, to the dismay of many electoral reformers and independent politicians.) Hale encouraged Hussein to work within the constraints of the new electoral law, which had been accepted by President Sleiman, Prime Minister Siniora, and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri.

DE-FANGING HIZBALLAH

14. (C) Hussein urged the incoming U.S. Administration to focus on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the key to unlocking Middle East peace. "The Palestinians have not been able to establish a resistance, but Hizballah is trying to apply the model to the Palestinian territories," said Hussein, advocating that a return to the 1949 Israel-Lebanon General Armistice Agreement as a means to undercut Hizballah's militancy. "The national defense strategy should be a political defense strategy. We should not let Hizballah define the means and ends of resistance. These are decisions for the government. But without a legitimate electoral law, strong parliament and judiciary, and development in the south, this is unachievable."

15. (U) This message has been cleared by DAS Hale.

SISON